

Department of Human Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, August 23, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
*Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-17
JET Program	18-21
Juvenile Justice	22-24
School Supplies	25-28
EITC	29-30
Faith-Based Organizations	31-32
Information Technology	33

*Important story at this spot

Foster care agency is shut down

2-year-old was killed in home overseen by center

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

August 23, 2006

The state Department of Human Services on Tuesday shut down a private nonprofit foster care program that had placed a 2-year-old boy in a Detroit home where police say he was beaten to death last week.

The program was run by the Lula Belle Stewart Center in Detroit, which worked with more than 80 licensed foster homes and supervised nearly 150 abused and neglected children who are wards of the court, the center's interim director Janet Burch said last week. She did not return calls Tuesday.

State social service workers began visiting each of the Stewart Center's foster homes on Tuesday to check on foster children and to inform foster parents that their licenses were being temporarily assigned to the DHS, meaning the department will supervise those homes for now, said DHS spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet.

The DHS summarily suspended the Stewart Center's child-placing license and said it will seek to permanently revoke it.

The shutdown came less than a week after 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge stopped breathing in the home of licensed foster parent Charlise Rogers, a single mother and retired autoworker who has been a foster parent for nine years. Isaac died during emergency treatment at Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit last Wednesday.

The Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office said Isaac was beaten with a blunt object or a fist. Detroit police, who are investigating, did not return numerous calls for comment Tuesday.



Isaac Lethbridge died last Wednesday. The Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office ruled he was beaten to death.

Sorbet said she could not comment on the investigation into Isaac's death.

"While we can't go into the specifics of the child protective services information, any time that there's something like this going on and the safety of children in licensed foster homes is questioned, then licensing has to move immediately to investigate and take appropriate action, which they did," Sorbet said.

Court records indicate that Isaac's 4-year-old sister may have been abused in the same home. She has been moved into a foster home in Washtenaw County where her younger sister was already living.

At an emergency Wayne County Family Court hearing Tuesday, Assistant Attorney General Yasmin Abdul-Karim began by offering her sympathy to Isaac's parents, Matthew and Jennifer Lethbridge, who now live in Whitmore Lake. Then she told the parents -- who lost custody of Isaac and his 4-year-old sister last September -- that the DHS would soon ask a judge to terminate their parental rights altogether for the 4-year-old.

Two Washtenaw County judges already have terminated the Lethbridge's parental rights to their six older children who later were adopted by foster parents. The oldest of their children, Ashleigh Lethbridge, died of natural causes in her adoptive home in February at age 12. Court records said Ashleigh was born blind and had mental retardation as well as muscle and nerve conditions.

The Lethbridge children began entering foster care in 1997 and the parental rights for the older six were terminated because of environmental and medical neglect and the parents' failure to fix the problems that led to the children's removal from their home, according to court records.

The youngest girl remains a temporary ward of the court in Washtenaw County.

Attorneys assigned by the court to represent the Lethbridges asked Wayne County Family Court Judge Leslie Kim Smith on Tuesday to delay the hearing so they could subpoena Isaac's foster care case worker at the Stewart Center. Smith postponed the hearing until Aug. 31 to decide whether the case should be transferred to Washtenaw County and whether to accept the DHS' petition to terminate the couple's parental rights to the 4-year-old.

The Lethbridges left the courtroom in tears.

"My child was killed and now they want to kill my family," a distraught Matthew Lethbridge said after the hearing. "How is this protecting kids?"

The Lethbridges have hired the law firm of Geoffrey Fieger to sue the agencies,

social service workers and foster parents involved in Isaac's death.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

Copyright © 2006 Detroit Free Press Inc.

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

Foster care license suspended after death License of Lula Belle center in Detroit may be revoked after toddler's death is ruled homicide.

Santiago Esparza and Norman Sinclair / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- The state Department of Human Services suspended the license of the Lula Belle Stewart Center Inc., a foster care program, with intent to revoke the license, following the death last week of a 2-year-old boy placed in a Detroit home by the program.

The DHS announced the suspension Tuesday.

Police say Isaac Lethbridge's death was a homicide. The Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office said the boy suffered blunt force injuries.

His death means that for the second time in almost seven months, Matt and Jennifer Lethbridge are mourning the loss of one of their children.

On Feb. 23, his 12-year-old sister, Ashleigh Marie Copeland, died of a grand mal seizure in another foster home, Jennifer Lethbridge said.

Police were called last Wednesday to a home in the 18000 block of Greenlawn after Charlise Rogers, the home's operator, said the child was unresponsive in his crib. The infant died at Children's Hospital of Michigan.

"We are devastated," Matt Lethbridge said of his son's death.

Albert Samuels, the chief investigator for the Wayne County medical examiner, said Isaac had an injury to his forehead and buttocks. The boy's 4-year-old sister also had been in Rogers' care and was removed to another foster home, Jennifer Lethbridge said.

The Lethbridges were separated last September when the children were removed by Child Protective Services because of filthy conditions at home, Matt Lethbridge said. He said he and his wife have reconciled, moved to Whitmore Lake, and were trying to regain custody of the children when Isaac died.

"If this had happened in our home, we would be in jail right now," Matt Lethbridge said. "But there are no suspects? That is what angers me."

Jennifer Lethbridge said they have been in contact with police but referred questions to their lawyer, Geoffrey Fieger.

The state's investigation found violations of administrative rules for re-evaluating foster homes, service plans for foster children, staff qualifications, license recommendations, special evaluations, visitations and reporting of child abuse or neglect.

The suspension means the center cannot accept new children for placement.

Lula Belle management was not available for comment.

You can reach Santiago Esparza at (313) 222-2127 or sesparza@detnews.com.



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published August 23, 2006

Attorneys spar over evidence in Holland case

Prosecution to release items for defense analysis

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

New details surrounding what may have happened to Ricky Holland's body after he died emerged Tuesday as attorneys haggled over evidence during a pretrial hearing for the boy's parents.

The 7-year-old's remains may have been placed in a blue tub before they were dumped in a marshlike area in rural Ingham County, according to statements made at the hearing. Tim Holland led police to his adopted son's remains - found wrapped in a sheet inside plastic garbage bags - nearly seven months after the boy was reported missing.

Tim and Lisa Holland, of Williamston, are charged with murder and child abuse in Ricky's death.

In an often-heated exchange Tuesday, Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency said it appeared Lisa Holland's attorneys were concealing evidence they discovered during their own investigation.

"Trace evidence is being held by the defense," he said.

Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield ruled a defense expert could analyze the garbage bags that held the boy's remains, as well as other items authorities have not yet turned over.

Those bags apparently could show that Ricky's remains had been in a blue tub.

Manderfield said authorities have to turn over the evidence by 5 p.m. Friday or the evidence would be suppressed at trial. Items requested include X-rays and CT-scans of the remains, as well as a hair sample.

Lisa Holland's co-counsel Mike Nichols said afterward that having an independent examination of evidence is crucial for their case. "We need to determine whether, and how, to challenge expert opinion," he said.

Judge: Siblings won't testify

None of Ricky Holland's four brothers and sisters, who range in age from 2 to 4, will testify as eyewitnesses in Tim and Lisa Holland's trials, Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield ruled Tuesday.

"They're not victims in this matter," Manderfield said.

That ruling came after a request by Lisa Holland's attorneys to question the children about what they saw, or didn't see, on the night authorities say Ricky was killed.

A forensics expert retained by Lisa Holland's attorneys has already been reviewing evidence, according to statements made Tuesday in court.

Also Tuesday, Manderfield said she would consider a joint defense request to pay for two experts to examine blood evidence. Those experts, from Okemos-based Speckin Forensic Laboratories, could cost the county \$18,000.

Tim Holland's co-counsel Frank Reynolds said in court that the testimony was necessary to challenge prosecution witnesses in an area of forensic science - blood stain analysis - he said is controversial. "(We) cannot be effective without the assistance of expert analysis," he said.

Manderfield last week ordered an investigation to determine how much money the court might approve for defense experts.

Additional pretrial hearings have not yet been scheduled.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

Copyright 2006 Lansing State Journal Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service (updated 12.20.02)

[\[Back\]](#)

WZZM13 ONLINE - ABC TELEVISION for ALL OF WEST MICHIGAN

Some key Holland evidence could be barred

By Kevin Grasha, Lansing State Journal

Created: 8/22/2006 4:38:38 PM

Updated: 8/22/2006 4:38:55 PM

Lansing - The garbage bags that contained Ricky Holland's remains, X-rays, CT-scans, as well as a hair sample, could be suppressed at trial unless authorities turn over the evidence to Lisa Holland's defense attorneys by 5 p.m. Friday.

Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield made this ruling this morning regarding the items the defense says it's been requesting since May.

Lisa and Tim Holland are charged with murder and child abuse in the death of their 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky.

Defense attorney Mike Nichols said he wants an independent expert to analyze the evidence.

Jury selection in Lisa Holland's trial is set to begin Sept. 11; her husband's trial is scheduled for next year.

[+ Increase Type Size](#)[- Decrease Type Size](#)

Web Editor: [John Bumgardner](#), Assignment Desk

59861

Copyright©2006 WZZM 13 ABC -



THE BAY CITY TIMES

Doctor: Infant died of cocaine intoxication

Ogemaw County woman to stand trial in tainted breast milk case

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

By ERIC ENGLISH

TIMES WRITER

WEST BRANCH - An Ogemaw County woman will stand trial in connection with the death of her 5-month-old daughter, after a medical expert testified Monday that the infant died from cocaine poisoning.

Prosecutors contend that 23-year-old Sara Shelby ingested cocaine, which then passed to her child through her breast milk.

At a preliminary examination held Monday in Ogemaw County District Court, an expert witness testified to support the prosecution's case.

"My opinion is (the baby) died of cocaine intoxication," said Dr. Kanu Virani, a forensic pathologist and deputy chief medical examiner for Oakland County.

Shelby's defense attorney, William D. Engemann, said others known to use cocaine were around the baby and the infant could have chewed on keys that were used by Shelby to ingest cocaine.

But Virani said the amount of metabolized cocaine found in the infant's system could only have come from the food the child was eating.

"Since the baby is fed only by a liquid diet, of formula and breast milk, it has to come from somewhere. Formula in this country does not contain cocaine," Virani said.

Virani said the drug could have interfered with brain impulses that regulated the child's heart beat and other functions. Virani noted an unusual amount of blood found in the infant's lungs, suggesting that the child's heart was not pumping efficiently.

The girl died on Aug. 21, 2005, in a home near Prescott. Detective Sgt. Tom Grace, of the Ogemaw County Sheriff's Department, testified that Shelby told him she had taken cocaine two or three times the day before her daughter's death.

Grace said Shelby told him that on Aug. 21 she laid down with the infant and another child for a nap and discovered the baby wasn't breathing an hour later. She called 911 and the infant was taken to West Branch Regional Medical Center by ambulance, where the child was subsequently pronounced dead.

The initial cause of death was believed to be sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS. But a blood analysis performed months later by a Michigan State Police Crime Laboratory showed the presence of metabolized cocaine in the child's system.

Ogemaw County District Judge Richard Noble ordered Shelby bound over to circuit court on an involuntary manslaughter charge, a 15-year felony. She is scheduled for arraignment on Sept. 20.

Shelby and her relatives present in the courtroom declined a request for comment by The Times.

Engemann said his client will plead not guilty in circuit court and he plans to introduce his own expert witness to counter the prosecution's case.

"At this point in time, we're still going ahead with our defense," he said.

Shelby remains free on bond pending further court proceedings.

©2006 Bay City Times

© 2006 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

ClickOnDetroit.com

Father Arrested On Suspicion Having Drugs, Baby In Car

POSTED: 4:36 pm EDT August 22, 2006

A local father has been arrested after police said he put his child in danger.

Joshua Lonczynski, 19, was found in a parked vehicle with his 6-month-old daughter and heroin in his possession, according to Clinton Township Police.

Witnesses called the police claiming they saw two people acting suspicious with a baby.

Police arrested Lonczynski but released the passenger in the car.

Lonczynski is facing possession of heroin and child endangerment charges.

Copyright 2006 by [ClickOnDetroit.com](http://www.clickondetroit.com). All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

THE DAILY Reporter

Print this story

Print Pa

Babysitter who 'shook baby,' caused death will be sentenced on Nov. 17

By Don Reid-Staff Writer

COLDWATER — A very soft spoken Ashley Marlene Holt, 20, said "guilty" when asked on Monday morning how she pled to the charge of involuntary manslaughter in the death of five-week-old Anairan Orozco-Aburto, after she babysat the child on May 18, 2005.

The plea to the 15-year felony came in place of the trial schedule for all this week. Branch County Circuit Court Judge Michael Cherry said the alternate charge of child abuse, first degree would be dismissed at sentencing on Nov. 17.

Holt testified the baby had been fussy that night "crying and gasping for air. So I shook her" to make sure she was breathing.

"I stayed up all night. She seemed fine," Holt told Judge Cherry.

When the mother arrived home from work in the early morning, they waited until the father and his brother, Holt's boyfriend, to return from work to take the baby to Community Health Center of Branch County's emergency room.

Defense attorney J. R. Colbeck asked the court to take the plea under advisement under the Holmes Youth Training Act (HYTA).

Prosecutor Kirk Kashian said his office would object to HYTA for Holt, but the decision to sentence her under the act is in the discretion of the judge. Under HYTA, if she successfully completes probation, she will not have a conviction listed on her record.

The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) probation staff began preparation of a presentence report and will make a recommendation on sentence and HYTA. As a first offender under age 22, Holt would technically qualify.

Colbeck said he discussed the charges with Holt and the plea meets the standard for guilt under case law for involuntary manslaughter. He pointed out Holt did not act with malice, did not intentionally cause the death and did not even intend to cause great bodily harm. She did "commit and assault (the shaking), which resulted in a death."

Colbeck had experts review the case and testimony of four doctors and experts, which Kashian had ready to testify at trial this week.

At a preliminary examination in July of 2005, Dr. David Start, the forensic pathologist who conducted the autopsy at Spectrum Blogett Health Center in Grand Rapids, said in his opinion the baby died from "closed cerebral trauma of abusive nature." The child also had pneumonia at the time of death.

Dr. Start explained the brain cells and blood vessels of the child were sheared inside the skull by an acceleration and abrupt deceleration. This resulted in hemorrhages, which covered both sides of the brain.

Start told Colbeck he could not say for sure what happened or when. There are a number of ways for the injury to occur.

"All are abusive in nature," the doctor said.

Dr. Start termed the cause of death "homicide," based on both his observations from the autopsy and information from police who Holt told she shook the baby girl.

The child's mother — through a Spanish interpreter — said Holt lived with her family and dated her brother-in-law. Orozco-Aburto said her two other children were asleep when her sister came to take her to work around 10:20 p.m.

Holt was babysitting all night for the first time so the mother could return to work. When the mother came home from work before 8 a.m. the baby's eyes were swollen and it was limp.

Orozco-Aburto testified her husband told her the child went into convulsions and he shook the baby before they took it to the emergency room a short time later.

Doctors ordered the child flown to Bronson Hospital in Kalamazoo for special treatment after the CT scan showed the hemorrhages.

Bronson pediatric specialist Dr. Tammy O. Drew said the child was there for a week and could breath on its own but "had no chance of recovery." She said the child had suffered from "shaken baby syndrome," which she admitted was a catch-all phrase of many kinds of blunt force trauma to the brain.

Kashian said the parents of the baby "wanted closure" and requested Holt be allowed to meet with them. Judge Cherry granted the request and said the report of the meeting, if it takes place, would be included in the pre-sentence report.

[Close Window](#)

DETROIT FREE PRESS NEWS IN A MINUTE: Oakland County

August 23, 2006

**ROCHESTER HILLS: \$1-million bond keeps man, 33,
jailed in sex case**

A 33-year-old man remains in the Oakland County Jail, unable to post a \$1-million bond, after he pleaded not guilty to attempting to extort sex from a Rochester Hills teenager. Babar Majid Chaudry asked for a court-appointed attorney to represent him when he appeared Tuesday before Rochester Hills District Judge Nancy Tolwin Carniak.

A not-guilty plea was entered for him; a preliminary exam was set for Aug. 31.

Chaudry, arrested Thursday in Ft. Wayne, Ind., is charged with extortion, engaging in sexually abusive activity against a child and using a computer to commit a crime. He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Oakland County Sheriff's Office investigators say Chaudry contacted the 15-year-old girl online in March and threatened to ruin her parents' financial credit history if she did not provide him with a nude photo of herself.

Investigators say other girls may have been threatened as well. Police have seized his computer and are continuing to investigate other possible victims.

The Detroit News

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

Oakland Briefs

Rochester Hills

Man charged with extorting nude photos

A 33-year-old man was charged Tuesday in Rochester Hills 52-3 District Court in a scheme in which he allegedly convinced a 16-year girl to e-mail him nude photographs and videotapes of herself to protect her family's credit. Babar Majid Chaudhry of Pakistan was extradited from Ft. Wayne, Ind., and is charged with extortion, child sexually abusive activity and use of a computer to commit a crime, all felonies punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Chaudhry was remanded to the Oakland County Jail in lieu of \$1 million cash bond.



School workers gets second chance

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

By Barton Deiters

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Martin Truax nearly saw his 17-year career in the public schools come to an end because of a faulty felon list provided by the state.

But after digging through old court records, he successfully proved to Grand Rapids Public Schools administrators that a 25-year-old gas stealing conviction was a misdemeanor, not a felony, allowing him to keep his maintenance job.

"They apologized. But it almost cost me my job. So, thanks, I guess," said Truax, 44, who served in Beirut with the Marines and has worked for 17 years in school maintenance.

The state this summer released a list of school employees with felony convictions in an effort to find sex offenders or other dangerous criminals working in schools. Under state law, districts can use the list to fire employees who have felony records or failed to disclose a conviction when they filled out their application.

But the list was criticized for errors and sparked debate about whether employees should be penalized for decades-old thefts or drug convictions.

All seven Kent and Ottawa county districts that had employees on the list decided the workers should keep their jobs. None of the felonies was of a sexual nature or crimes involving children.

"There are cases where something bad happens as a young person that can turn around and turn into something good as an adult," said Jim Cammenga, spokesman for Zeeland Public Schools.

A Zeeland teacher is on the felony list for having a 1989 drug manufacturing and delivery conviction, but the school board let him keep his job.

In explaining the case to the district, the teacher said he was a Ferris State University sophomore when he attended a fraternity party and met a young woman who asked if he could get her some marijuana.

He said he bought \$20 worth of marijuana and gave it to the young woman, who actually was working undercover for the Mecosta County Sheriff's Department. He never had another run-in with police, and became a teacher.

Truax, meanwhile, faced the daunting task of proving the state police list was incorrect. He approached the district's human resources department and was told he had 30 days to clear up any inaccuracy or be fired.

"There was no 'you've been a good employee, so let's forget what happened 25 years ago,' it was 'you're on the list we'll let you go,' " Truax said.

Truax said the incident happened when he was 19 and drinking and hanging out with friends, who decided

they needed some gasoline. He said he waited in the car as his friends siphoned diesel fuel from a tractor. As they drove away, a Wyoming police officer pulled them over. Truax served 30 days in jail instead of paying \$100 in fines at Wyoming District Court.

To prove his case, he spent hours at Wyoming District Court while staff pulled out dusty archives and finally produced the original record showing his crime was a misdemeanor.

"There were a couple of mistakes on his state record," court administrator Jay Murphy said. "How that happened is pure speculation."

State police said their information accurately reflected what they received from the district court. Wyoming court staff said the error could have come from transposed numbers, or perhaps Truax's status was incorrectly changed when laws were altered.

Grand Rapids human resources director Fredericka Williams said the district allows people time to clear up records but stands by its no-felony policy to protect children.

In Rockford, Superintendent Michael Shibler sees no reason to fire a bus driver accused of filing a false police report last year.

"This is an employee who made a mistake," Shibler said. "I took a good look at the circumstances and I don't think the mistake has any effect on how this person -- a loyal employee for 10 years -- works with children."

Send e-mail to the author: bdeiters@grpress.com

©2006 Grand Rapids Press

© 2006 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

[Return to regular web page](#)

This is a printer friendly version of an article
from **The Detroit News**

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

August 23, 2006

Welfare reform: 10 years later

State focuses on jobs, education

The poor get weaned off cash aid, thrive at work

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

TROY -- At least three times over the past seven years, Lynn Wright and her family turned to the state for welfare assistance.

When her husband recently became disabled, Wright participated in Michigan's newest generation of welfare reform, which is aimed at moving people into careers that keep families off assistance for good.

"I am nervous but excited that I'm suddenly re-entering the work force," said Wright, who began training this month to be a shift supervisor at a frozen yogurt parlor. "This will be the highest level I've ever gone in a job."

The number of Michigan residents receiving cash assistance dropped dramatically from its all-time high of about 250,000 in 1981 to about 80,000 today. But as the nation marks 10 years since an overhaul of the welfare system in the Clinton administration, Michigan is moving to get more families permanently off cash assistance.

Those who are getting assistance often have received it more than once, and officials believe that's because they struggle with more complex barriers -- substance abuse and mental health problems, illiteracy, child care and transportation.

Over the past decade, Michigan focused primarily on moving welfare recipients into a job. But now, it is fine-tuning its efforts by piloting a \$40 million program, known as Jobs, Education and Training, in Kent, Sanilac, Oakland and Wayne counties, with goals of enrolling half of the people on cash assistance by the end of 2007.

"We are focusing on moving families out of poverty, not just getting a job, any job," said Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

National welfare-to-work efforts began 10 years ago this week with Michigan leading the nation, launching its reform four years earlier.

At the time, welfare recipients -- 90 percent of whom were single mothers -- could receive cash assistance until their youngest child turned 18. There were no incentives for work.

Expectations changed with reform. At the same time, other public assistance programs were enhanced so they were able to have support in health care, food and child care.

Cash assistance may be down, but people who moved from welfare to work are still struggling. Officials note that the number of people in the Medicaid and food assistance programs is at historic levels.

"It's precisely because their work does not pay enough to fully support a family that they continue to need those programs," said Jackie Doig of the Center for Civil Justice.

Before the pilot programs, the first priority for Michigan welfare recipients was work.

"If you are only working a minimum-wage job with a couple of children at home, the chance of you getting off cash assistance isn't good and getting out of poverty is almost impossible," said Jim Nye, deputy director of the Department of Human Services.

Among those who have participated in training is Wendy Mazzie, 34.

She has worked as a cashier, waitress and packaging clerk. She needed cash assistance when she was laid off from her job and her husband broke his leg.

The JET program paid for her to complete a nursing assistant program at St. Clair Community College, at a cost of nearly \$1,000.

Mazzie is glad to be moving forward in a career.

"It's more stable," said Mazzie. "And there's more opportunities in that than just a job."

Carolyn Rotarius, 47, struggled with a drug addiction years ago, and recently with her weight.

But that changed when she participated in the JET program.

"I am ready, so ready, to go back to work," said Rotarius, a Hazel Park resident who will begin a caregiver job soon.

"When I think of having almost \$200 a week, that is just going to be amazing."

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

[Return to regular web page](#)

Making The MOST Of JET

MIRS, Tuesday, August 22, 2006

Even though a program the Department of Human Services (DHS) is piloting as a way to permanently move people off welfare and into the workforce is similar to at least one other outdated work assistance program, supporters believe it will take off where other programs crashed and burned.

The newest get-people-off-welfare program is called the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program and was created as an agreement between the governor, the Legislature and the DHS to fix the state's welfare population (See "[DHS Budget Allows JET To Take Flight](#)," 7/14/06).

Republicans, specifically House Republicans, wanted to start kicking off the rolls welfare recipients who seemed to be riding the system. In the end, though, they begrudgingly agreed to try the JET program, which is designed to help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

The goal of the JET program is to hold welfare recipients' hands as they learn life-long job skills and, eventually, learn how to obtain and retain a job. As a result of this program, the DHS hopes to see a \$37 million reduction in welfare costs, or a 10 percent decline in the number of people receiving welfare assistance by Fiscal Year 2007.

JET's broad goal — to get people working and off welfare — parallels both the Michigan Opportunity and Skills Training (MOST) program, which was implemented in the 1980s, and the Work First program, which is a jobs program tied to the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) that replaced MOST years ago.

MIRS had a difficult time finding someone who had detailed knowledge of the MOST program however, Don **MUSSEN** with the DHS, was willing to compare and contrast MOST, Work First and JET.

"MOST involved many of the same components that were involved in both JET and Work First," Mussen said. "The components don't really change."

What does change is the way the programs are carried out, Mussen said. Mussen made it clear that he doesn't consider MOST or Work First "failed" programs. They were programs that served a purpose, did some good but, in the case of MOST, ultimately fell apart because they needed to be revamped to align with welfare recipients' needs.

All of the programs were created to get people to work, increase their work skills so they could get jobs and to help the people find jobs once they were ready to go out into the work place.

"These components are still the building blocks of the program," Mussen said.

However, MOST wasn't individualized, invited a heady influx of participants, wasn't incentive oriented and didn't work with state job providing agencies, Mussen said.

MOST required people to sign a personal statement, which basically said they would participate in the program and abide by the rules before they were allowed to join. If they failed to follow through, the individual could be disqualified.

Unlike MOST, JET gets the whole community involved and really focuses on the individual, Mussen said. When a person joins JET, their representative sits down with them and other community members. They identify the obstacles that might get in the person's way of securing and keeping a job and also puts together a support system to keep that person on the up and up.

The DHS punishes both the family and the individual if the person screws up while in the JET program. The whole family is knocked off assistance for a minimum of 90 days, which is stricter than the 30-day individual sanction issued under MOST.

The idea is that the JET sanctions and community involvement will help people keep jobs for a long period of time, which will decrease recidivism rates.

"I think JET is needed because we have to reduce the overall number of people receiving assistance and now we have a lot of people who got a job and lost it and then come back into the system," Mussen said. "What we need is an approach that is focused more on that population."

To focus on that tough population, JET is also bumping up the number of times DHS personnel offer post job support. JET offers this population six months of support rather three months of support.

"I think it will get people started and give them more time to identify issues that might mess them up," Mussen said.

MIRS asked Mussen what happens if a person who said drinking was a major obstacle to job retention, kept his job for seven months (a month longer than the six-month assistance limited offered by JET), and then fell off the wagon and lost the job.

Wouldn't that person then fall back into the system?

"This (JET) doesn't mean that no one will ever loose a job again," Mussen said. "I do know that if they're on the job and they go back on case assistance, their income reduces by half."

Because most people don't remember or weren't around when MOST was implemented, it will be interesting to see if JET has the same impact on people's memories that MOST did.

Mussen has faith in the new program because it falls in line with an overall shift in how the government deals with welfare recipients. When MOST was around, the idea was to teach the people job skills. Now the idea is to get the person out of the program.

"We see people continually cycling into the program," Mussen said. "Holding a job is not possible for them because of barriers that haven't been identified. We know we have a problem with retaining employment and we have to increase attention to helping them with skills. This is the reason we shifted from Work First to JET."

Work First focused on skills and training, JET focuses on skills, training and getting rid of barriers that prevent people from holding down jobs, he said.

Playground Torched By Careless Kids

August 23, 2006

MUSKEGON -- A church playground on the lakeshore, a safe-haven for children, was burned to the ground Tuesday afternoon. Investigators say it's the work of kids playing with lighters.

It happened at Angel Community Church on the corner of Apple Avenue and Williams Street in Muskegon.

Church leaders built the playground 6 years ago to give children a safe place to go to stay out of trouble. Fire investigators say two kids who took advantage of the park are the same ones accused of setting it on fire.

It's hard for neighbors to believe the twisted burnt metal, bars and burnt plastic used to be a colorful sign of hope for the community.

"I'm very pissed about it because it really shouldn't have happened," said concerned resident Michelle Spears.

The fire marshall says two nine year olds are responsible for setting the playground on fire. "It wasn't intentional. Playing with lighters, doing what kids do," said Pastor Jeffery Hough of Angel Community Church.

People who live in the neighborhood are confused and upset. The playground was used by 300 to 400 kids each week.

"The parents in the neighborhood could bring their kids right here to this area and not have to worry," said Spears.

Neighbors are already taking up donations, hoping to rebuild. The pastor said if the insurance company does not cover the costs, the church cannot afford the \$10 thousand to build a new one.

"Just when you thought it could be worse, people come along with that silver lining and show you that things aren't really as bad as you thought they were," said Pastor Hough.

The Fire Marshall says the case will now be handed over to the juvenile court for punishment. The children will have to attend fire safety classes, and their parents may have to pay for some of the damage.

MORNING SUN

Budget woes for county

More cuts, involving lost positions, expected

By ROSEMARY HORVATH
Sun Staff Writer

Gratiot County government is about to shrink if commissioners holdfast to an objective set Tuesday to further cut proposed spending by nearly \$271,000 in the next fiscal year.

Facing elimination are positions in probate court, building and grounds and Friend of the Court offices.

Not only did commissioners nix any appropriation for the county Fair for Youth but they also put a \$78,508 payment to support the MSU Extension program in jeopardy.

All proposed cuts will be discussed further at a finance committee meeting Sept. 5 before the full board takes final action. At a budget work session Tuesday, at first the board agreed to withdraw \$551,088 from the delinquent tax revolving fund to balance next year's budget. Commissioner Trent Wilhelm, finishing up his final term, pushed for a lower amount and county Administrator Brian Smith recommended using only \$280,000.

Commissioner Roger Cook proposed doing away with the D.A.R.E. program designed to dissuade junior high students from using illegal drugs. The Sheriff's Office provides 200 man-hours for a deputy to be a presenter and donations and volunteers keep the program functional. Cook questioned the program's effectiveness and whether the county would be better off to have that deputy on the road.

A child care fund that the Circuit Court Family Division uses to place juveniles requiring professional oversight may see a \$20,000 reduction. The office has instituted in-county options to placing juveniles outside the county. As a result, placement costs have fallen except that commissioners now want to hold down spending further.

Keeping the child care appropriation at \$740,000 may mean that commissioners will follow in the path of other counties and direct the circuit court judge to not exceed that amount.

Those non-mandated programs that requested budget increases probably will see appropriations frozen instead. These include Mid Michigan Health Department, Greater Gratiot Development, Gratiot Community Airport and East Central Michigan Planning.

Greater Gratiot and its regional counterpart East Central are tied to promoting economic development at all levels of local government. The only uncertainty arising at the work session was over a \$200,000 appropriation to Community Mental Health of Gratiot County. A recommendation was tabled until the September session when details of funding the program are outlined.

Animal control, permits office, veterans counselor and other offices that are self-sustaining from the revenue they generate will avoid the chopping block.

The county is in the process of negotiating a contract with courthouse employees. The contract expires at the end of September. Depending on the outcome, more budget cuts could be made, the county administrator said.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.themorningsun.com/stories/082306/loc_Budge1.shtml

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.demosite.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Aug 22, 2006

School supply pickups scheduled this week

Backpacks and school supplies for needy children in Monroe County can be picked up starting today and continuing through Thursday as part of a program sponsored by the Salvation Army and the Monroe County Department of Human Services.

The pickup hours are from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day at the DHS office, 1051 S. Telegraph Rd.

Applications were due Friday for this distribution.

The remaining backpacks and school supplies will be distributed by appointment - on a first-come, first-served basis - starting Friday at the Salvation Army, 815 E. First St.

For information, call Kyle Hudson, director of Salvation Army Social Services, at 241-0440.



Church offers free school supplies

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

Church of Christ of Jackson will sponsor a "school supplies extravaganza" after Sunday's 11 a.m. service.

Members will give free backpacks and other school supplies to children from the community while supplies last. Food and other treats also will be available.

Call Jonni at the church, 782-1810, before the day of the event to reserve your spot.

All children younger than age 18 must be accompanied by an adult.

The church is at 1275 Wayne St.

©2006 Jackson Citizen Patriot

© 2006 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

This is a printer friendly version of an article from **livingstondaily.com**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Aug 23, 2006

Maria Stuart: Backpack drive needs help now

As we get our son, Will, ready for second grade, we've assessed our back-to-school situation.

The winter coat — bought purposely big last year — fits well this year. Whew!

But Will's grown a lot this summer, which meant some new pants and shirts. We've also been accumulating his supplies throughout the summer.

He was pretty much ready to go a couple weeks ago when he brought his backpack out of the closet, where it's been since the last day of school in June.

Alas, the poor backpack has seen much, much better days. We worked some miracles on the broken-down backpack with duct tape last year, but the beating the bag took at the hands of my 7-year-old has rendered it wholly unfit for duty. We are compassionately retiring it.

Backpacks can be pricey, but we found one at a decent cost that suited Will, who's been practicing with his new bag. It's a one-strap, ergonomic model that goes across the chest to evenly distribute the weight. That's not why Will wanted it; it was all about the decorations on the bag. Still, it holds all his gear and he's happy with it. I'm crossing my fingers it'll last him the entire year.

There are some kids in the county who aren't so lucky, though, and that's why I'm asking for your help — fast.

The start of the 2006-2007 school is just around the corner, and the annual Livingston Educational Service Agency school supply drive is coming up short with backpacks.

While folks have donated enough school supplies to help out the needy kids in the county, the drive has fallen way short on backpacks. So far, there have been 250 backpacks donated — about half of the goal of outfitting 500-600 students.

Today is Wednesday. They're going to start distributing the back-to-school items from 4:30-7 p.m. Thursday. This means that if you're going to help, you need to do it quickly.

So, if you want to start the school off on a wonderful note for a needy county kid, quickly buy a backpack and bring it to the LESA office at 1425 W. Grand River Ave. in Howell, across from the county complex; or to any Republic Bank branch in the county.

This is the fourth year for the drive, and every year, the number of kids needing help grows. This year is also a tricky one: the bad economy increases the demand for help and the bad economy makes it more difficult to help.

I'm hoping you can find a way to participate.

Fancy footwork

The inaugural "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes" event to bring awareness to the problem of sexual assault in our community and raise money for LACASA is on for Saturday at the Tanger Outlet Center at

Kensington Valley at Burkhart and Highland roads in Howell Township — rain or shine. The event has men walking a mile in women's shoes.

LACASA is the organization in Livingston County that deals with domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.

Julie Smith, LACASA's development director, says her office is full of shoes participants can wear if they want to walk the mile route at the mall.

Even if you're not walking in the event, you're encouraged to attend and cheer on those who are, Smith said.

A couple of dozen men have already signed up for the event. Among them are Dr. Roscoe Stuber, Prosecutor David Morse, former Sheriff Don Homan and WDIV newscaster Steve Garagiola.

Smith helped Mike Murphy of the Livingston County Sheriff's Department by tracking down a size 14 woman's shoe for him to wear.

"That was a special order," Smith said.

Others participating in the event include Jeff Boyd, director of Livingston County's EMS service. Smith said Boyd's fellow workers have put together a special ensemble for him to wear.

The team calling itself the Saint Joseph Mercy Livingston Queens — representing Saint Joseph Mercy Livingston Hospital — is made up of Steve Henrie, Mike Markel and Drs. Bill Bradfield, Paul Theilking and Troy Sibson.

Mike Johnson, who works at Independence Village of Brighton Valley in Brighton, auctioned off the right to paint one of his toes to the residents. He sold all 10 of them and a lot of the seniors at the center will be coming to the mall via bus to cheer him on.

In all, it's going to be a wild and wacky event to raise much-needed funds for a serious cause.

If you want to participate and would like to register, call Smith at LACASA at (517) 548-1350. Donations are always welcome, too.

And if, like me, you're amazed at the lengths some people will go to for a great cause, be sure to be at the Tanger Outlet Center on Saturday to cheer these brave souls on. Registration begins at 9:30 a.m., and the well-heeled guys will step off at 10:30 a.m.

For pledge forms, visit LACASA at 2895 W. Grand River Ave. in Howell Township, or the customer service center in the food court at the Tanger Outlet Center. While pledges are appreciated, they are not required.

For more information, call LACASA at (517) 548-1350, or visit www.lacasa1.org or www.walkamileinhershoes.org.

Maria Stuart is the managing editor of the Livingston County Daily Press & Argus, as well as a member of the LACASA board of directors. You can reach her by calling (517) 552-2856, or by sending e-mail to her at mstuart@gannett.com.



Column: Lawmakers consider buoying low-wage workers -- with (surprise) a tax cut

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

By Sharon Emery

Unless you've been consciously trying to protect yourself from the mind-numbing complexity of Michigan tax policy, you probably know what SBT stands for.

Even if you don't really want to.

As the lightning rod in the current battle for the governor's office, and even in some legislative races across the state, the Single Business Tax is big news.

And while I know it's ultimately everyone's business because it affects the economy, that's true of another tax change that's received considerably less attention in Lansing.

Ready for this? EITC, short for Earned Income Tax Credit.

Before you totally tune me out, get this: It's targeted at low-wage Michigan workers.

Yeah, really. More than 600,000 of them, according to Sharon Parks of the Michigan League for Human Services, which does research on social policy. She called it the most successful anti-poverty tool in the country.

Enacting a state EITC -- there's already one for federal taxes -- would directly affect about five times as many people as there are businesses currently paying the SBT.

And Republicans who control the Legislature are actually thinking about doing it, possibly as early as Aug. 30.

They are considering using the EITC as bait to get the Democrats to agree to giving immediate effect to worker exemptions the GOP wants in place before the hourly minimum wage jumps to \$6.95 on Oct. 1. Without immediate effect, they'd have to wait until spring to limit the wage hike's scope, which business desperately wants. Republicans are also using the EITC to resist the governor's plan to change the Merit Award college scholarship.

The EITC lets low-wage workers keep more of their money instead of paying it out in taxes. The federal credit gave Michigan residents as much as \$1 billion to pump into local economies in 2002, according to a League for Human Services report. A state credit could produce \$102 million.

The federal EITC was doubled during the '90s, when Republicans and Democrats alike were trying to get welfare reform to work. Seventeen states also have one. Michigan has been slow to take up the idea, however, even as it has pushed more welfare recipients to help support themselves.

"As service-sector employment expands, there's a growing recognition that you cannot support a family on those wages," Parks told me. "... If they (welfare clients) are doing what we've ask them to do, then work has to pay."

Michigan Republicans, who haven't historically championed the issue, agree on giving the working poor more spending money.

By enacting the EITC, "We would be cutting taxes and stimulating the economy -- two major Republican goals," said Ari Adler, a spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema.

Under a GOP plan, the Michigan EITC would be 10 percent of the federal EITC. (Democrats wanted 25 percent.) So take a working single mom with one child: The Internal Revenue Service gives her a tax credit of up to \$2,662 if she makes less than about \$31,000. If Michigan had a 10 percent EITC, she would also get a state credit of up to \$266.

The state tax cut, however, is tied up in that political fight over appeasing business on the minimum wage hike and appeasing middle-class parents on how the Merit Award is doled out. But, if necessary, "We would be willing to talk to the Democrats about something positive for Michigan's economy, such as approving the EITC," Adler said.

Senate Minority Leader Bob Emerson has put the EITC on his to-do list, so Democrats are likely to insist on that conversation.

The rub is paying for the EITC, which might cost \$130 million annually and gets to the heart of Michigan tax policy. The cost of any Earned Income Tax Credit would be on top of the \$500 million Republicans want to cut in overhauling the Single Business Tax.

We'll soon see just how much tax-cutting lawmakers can stomach.

Contact Sharon Emery at (517) 487-8888 x236 or e-mail her at semery@boothnewspapers.com.

©2006 Booth Newspapers

© 2006 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published August 23, 2006

Bernero creates faith-based office

Social services agency will tap federal grants

By Tom Lambert
Lansing State Journal

Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero established a faith-based office Tuesday afternoon that will seek state and federal grants to help fund local social services.

Bernero signed the executive order at Union Baptist Church, surrounded by several religious leaders including Bishop David Maxwell of Eliezer Temple. Maxwell will oversee the office.

"This will be a grass-roots effort to provide access to city services that people who are underserved may not know about," Bernero said. "And this will help facilitate volunteerism in the community."

The City Hall-based office will be tasked with helping local organizations identify state and federal funding.

Maxwell, a supporter of Bernero in his bid for mayor last year, will receive \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually to run the office, the mayor said. That money will come from the city's general fund.

"We can make a huge difference in Lansing by tapping into grants from public and private agencies and foundations," Maxwell said.

"During these tough budget times, it is crucial that we leverage every possible resource to maximize the impact of our community and faith-based organizations."

Faith-based funding

- President Bush established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, which allows faith-based community groups around the country to better compete for federal dollars.
- Gov. Jennifer Granholm created a similar office to tap into the federal funding.
- To become a volunteer for Lansing's faith-based office, call Bernero's office at 483-4141.

On the Web

- For more information, go to www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/index.html
- For more information on the statewide effort, go to www.michigan.gov/outreach

Related news from the Web

Latest headlines by topic:

- [Activism](#)
- [George Bush](#)
- [US News](#)

Powered by Topix.net

But Henry Silverman, vice president of Lansing's American Civil Liberties Union chapter, said he is concerned because the office raises the issue of separation of church and state.

"Public funds can't be used to support any form of discrimination," said Silverman. "The mayor has to be very careful to make sure that doesn't happen."

Bernero said his initiative is about inclusion and it will not be divisive in any way. Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm, in an effort to capture more federal grants, created a statewide office of community and faith-based initiatives in March 2005.

Contact Tom Lambert at 377-1063 or tlambert@lsj.com.

Copyright 2006 Lansing State Journal Use of this site signifies your agreement to the Terms of Service (updated 12.20.02)

[\[Back\]](#)